



Department of Commerce Safety Report

September 2002

Safety Report September 2002

Introduction

This report provides an update to Department of Commerce (DOC) managers and employees on the progress of Departmental safety initiatives and information regarding important Department-wide safety issues for September 2002. The report also contains the latest available accident data for the Department. Section One of the report, Program Initiatives, provides updates on the safety initiatives outlined in the Safety Program Plan available at <http://ohrm.doc.gov/safetyprogram/safety.htm>. Section Two, Significant Safety Issues, outlines safety issues and concerns which arose in September 2002. Section Three, Injury Statistics, provides statistics regarding Department injuries, as reported to the Office of Workers' Compensation for August 2002, and an analysis of the data to assist bureaus in focusing their safety efforts. Section Four, Survey Results, provides the August and September results from the on-line survey available through the intranet Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Program Web Site.

Section One: Program Initiatives

Commerce Safety Culture:

"It seems just fine overall. I'm certainly in favor of a safe work place, but I wonder why this is suddenly a major cause even in areas that are exclusively an office environment."

This comment was submitted through the Safety Survey Web Site. It is similar in nature to comments we receive and is particularly noteworthy, in that it identifies two of the primary impediments to establishing a safe workplace. They are employee perception and attitude. Most employees will say they support a safe workplace. However, many employees do not actively support safety efforts. To reduce injuries and accidents employees must recognize that safety is a value and a responsibility we all share.

Commerce had over 2000 reported injuries and illnesses over the last three years. Approximately, 600 of those occurred in offices. They included broken arms and legs, lacerations, back injuries, and a host of other injuries. In addition to the human toll, workplace injuries cost Commerce over \$15 million in workers' compensation yearly. We ask, how many injuries and at what cost should we be willing to accept?

Safety Excellence:

The most important characteristic of safety excellence is management leadership. Leadership must demonstrate a strong, genuine, continuous, and personal commitment to safety. Leadership must:

- Communicate a vision
- Integrate goals for addressing safety, health, and environmental concerns into business
- Define roles and responsibilities
- Require accountabilities from all employees
- Allocate resources to support programs
- Conduct assessments to support changes
- Take proactive measures

Employee involvement is the second most importance characteristic.

Employee involvement in activities that proactively identify hazards is an important component of an effective safety management system. This involvement is based on the ability to recognize hazards using several tools. These tools include Job Safety Analysis, Physical Hazard Inspections, Employee Safety Training, Safety Meetings, and Job Safety Observation.¹

Secretary Evans and Deputy Secretary Bodman emphasized the importance of employee safety in Commerce and are committed to ensuring that each employee is provided a safe and healthy working environment. The Commerce Safety Council is working to establish a safety culture that further reflects that commitment and focuses on the characteristics that make an effective and successful safety program.

Employees and managers are encouraged to become actively involved in the process and work to establish a proactive safety program at their work locations. To emphasize safety, you can establish a safety committee to discuss safety issues, perform safety evaluations of your work environment, conduct accident investigations, perform or provide safety training, and stop unsafe behavior. Many of these activities are required, but they are also the right thing to do.

Safety Managers' Meeting: The Commerce Safety Managers held their monthly meeting on September 12, 2002. The Commerce Safety Director, Tony Pierpoint, presided over the meeting. The key topics included the Department's Safety Council training and inspection checklists. Progress reports were provided from the four special working groups established by the Safety

1. National Safety Council, Safety and Health Code of Ethics, 2002

Action Plan for FY 2002. Other topics included the need to establish guidance for Automated External Defibrillators and reporting procedures.

Safety Program Action Plan: We continue to make progress on the Safety Program Action Plan approved by the Deputy Secretary in February. The plan is posted on the OSH Program Web Site. The four workgroups, which were established to address key components of the proposed Action Plan, continue to work aggressively to identify and implement key initiatives. The goals and activities of each workgroup are listed below. Each group reported its progress at the September Safety Managers meeting.

Inspections and Self-Assessment Workgroup - This workgroup is developing a Department-wide methodology for supervisors to conduct safety self-assessments and safety professionals to complete annual workplace inspections. The workgroup completed the final review process of two checklists for supervisor and safety manager inspections. The checklists are titled "CD 573 - Office Safety Inspection Checklist for Safety Managers" and "CD 574 - Office Safety Inspection Checklist for Supervisors and Program Managers", and are available on the Forms Web Site at:
<http://www.osec.doc.gov/forms/direct.htm>.

Communications and Training Policy Workgroup - This workgroup is developing safety awareness and training tools for employees and supervisors. The workgroup completed final revisions of the DOC Safety Poster and will have it ready for distribution in October 2002. The workgroup is also completing changes to a web-based executive level safety training package, which will also be available in October 2002.

Reporting Workgroup - This workgroup is developing a web-based system to report accidents. The system will be more comprehensive than the Workers' Compensation system. The workgroup reported that the contractor selection process is complete for the Workers' Compensation Program function. An official announcement was sent via e-mail to employees.

Health Units Workgroup - This workgroup is assessing the effectiveness of Department Health Units and developing Departmental guidance regarding on-site health and occupational safety services. They are in the process of preparing a performance-based contract for the HCHB Health Unit, with the expectation that the contract will maximize customer service.

Section Two: Significant Safety Issues

Ergonomic Problems:

We routinely receive calls from employees suffering from headaches, eye strain, and musculoskeletal disorders from computer use. Most computer users report some kind of physical problem. Positioning or using your computer improperly can lead to various injuries, from the short term discomfort of headaches to potentially debilitating conditions like Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. Arranging your workstation can reduce muscle stress and prevent potential problems.

Prevent Glare - Screen glare can cause eye strain and headaches. To prevent glare the work station should be arranged so that the operator does not face an unshielded window or a bright light source. The orientation of the video screen should be perpendicular or nearly perpendicular to the line of windows.

Place the monitor directly in front of you at a distance of 18-30 inches. You should look down to view the screen at an angle of 5-20 degrees. As a general rule, the top of the screen should be no higher than eye level. This will reduce strain on your eyes, neck, shoulders and back.

Adjust Chair and Keyboard - A properly adjusted chair allows the operator to place both feet firmly on the floor when seated comfortably. If your feet cannot be placed flat on the floor when seated, a footrest may be useful.

Maintain proper body posture by keeping your wrist in a neutral position (not bent upwards or downwards), your elbows bent at approximately 90 degree angles comfortably at your sides, your lower back supported by the chair, your thighs parallel to the floor, and your knees bent at approximately 90 degree angles.

Prevent compression of the wrist and hands. Hands and fingers should be relaxed while keying. There are an assortment of padded mouse and key pads available. These accessories will help you avoid placing your wrists on a hard surface, maintain a neutral hand position, and reduce strain.

Take Breaks - Alternate your activities. You should take a 5-10 minute break from the computer for every hour of continuous typing. The break is time away from the computer. You can continue to perform other work, such as filing or paperwork, in lieu of typing. Breaks help relieve muscle tension and reduce stress.

Section Three: Injury Statistics and Analysis

In previous Safety Reports, we provided information on the total number of Departmental injuries for the past five years, and analyzed the types of injuries across the Department to determine the prevalence of such injuries.

The information below is updated using August 2002 statistics. Due to late submissions, processing limitations, and to ensure the accuracy of the information, this section will continue to include information up to the previous month. The data presented in the charts and tables are based upon Departmental Workers' Compensation Program records. At the present time, Workers' Compensation Program records continue to afford the most comprehensive evidence regarding workplace safety.

The information in this section includes data for all cases submitted to the Workers' Compensation Office, including first aid cases. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) does not include first-aid cases as reportable incidents. As such, the incident rates reported in this section when compared to other Agencies and Industries are inflated. We will begin identifying reportable and non-reportable incidents separately, next month.

Total Reported Cases Incidence Rate: The Total Reported Cases Incidence Rate (TRCIR) formula divides the number of accidents by the actual hours worked in the organization and multiplies that figure by 200,000, an approximation of potential hours worked for 100 employees. In determining the total hours worked for an organization, we multiplied the number of employees by 1800 hours. A full-time employee can technically work 2087 hours per year if he or she takes no leave. However, given that the average age of our workforce is 46.9 years and the average years of service is 12.8, we imputed the average annual leave accrual rate as seven hours¹. Based on a seven hour annual leave accrual rate, we then estimated that each employee annually uses approximately 280 hours of combined annual, sick, and administrative leave. We subtracted that total from 2087 and rounded down to 1800. Using this formula, we updated injury rates from FY98 to the present and now depict them as total reported case incidence rates (TRCIR)².

¹An employee with three years of service earns six hours of annual leave per pay period. An employee with 15 years of service earns eight hours per pay period. All full-time employees earn four hours of sick leave per pay period. There are typically 26 pay periods in a leave year.

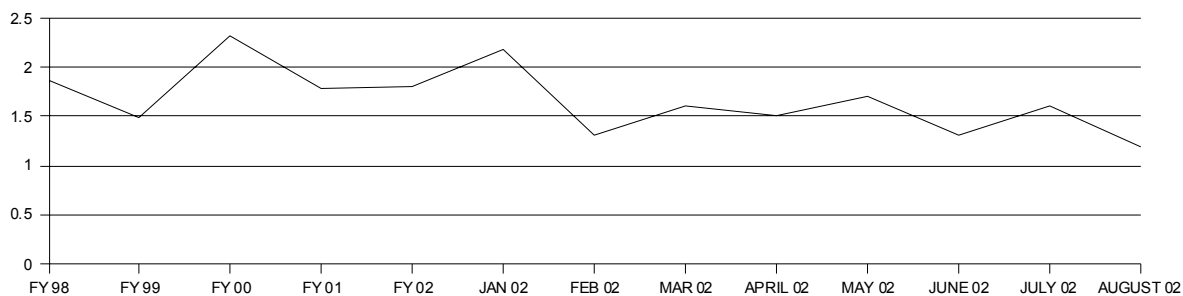
² **Please note:** The Total Reported Cases Incidence Rates (TRCIRs) for FY02 presented in this table are based on October 2001 through August 2002 information.

Major Findings include:

- **The FY02 TRCIR is comparable to FY01, but down from FY00.** Although the data are not yet complete, the TRCIR for FY02 is 1.80 based on data from October 2001 through August 2002. The January 2002 TRCIR was 2.18 while the August figure was 1.2. If these figures do not change, the TRCIR will be slightly higher than FY01 (1.78), but lower than FY00 (2.32), as shown in chart one. There were 34 Workers' Compensation claims submitted for injuries or illnesses in August. However, the Workers' Compensation Program continues to receive claims from previous months.

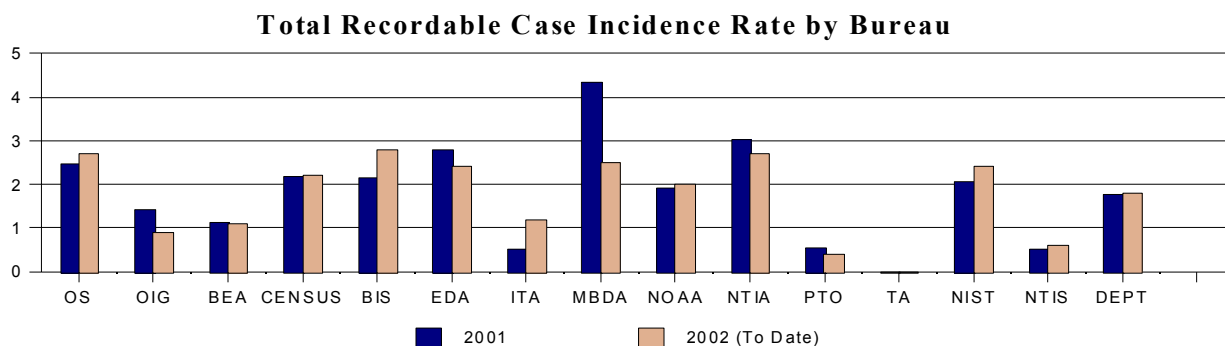
Chart 1

Total Recordable Case Incidence Rate Trend



- **Of the larger bureaus, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Office of the Secretary (OS), and the International Trade Administration (ITA) will have higher TRCIRs for FY02 when compared to FY01 (see table 1 and chart 2).** NIST saw a downward trend for TRCIRs from FY98 to FY01. However, their projected rate for FY02 is 17 percent higher than last year. NIST had three injuries reported for the month of August. One employee received a puncture wound while cutting a box. Another employee strained a back muscle while moving a computer monitor, and the third employee received an electric shock while repairing an air conditioning unit. The TRCIR for OS is 10 percent higher than last year. The TRCIR for ITA is substantially higher than FY01, but consistent with previous years.
- **Of the smaller bureaus (i.e., bureaus with less than 500 employees), only the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) will have a significantly higher annual TRCIR for FY02 than FY01.** The incident rate for BIS is up 30 percent from FY01, but down from previous years and down 31 percent from FY00. BIS had nine injuries during FY02. Most of the injuries were caused during law enforcement training exercises (four injuries) or motor vehicle accidents (also four injuries).

Chart 2



Types of Injuries: Many of the injuries reported can be prevented through improved safety awareness and proper maintenance. A Departmental and bureau focus on eliminating injuries and illnesses is essential. Eliminating injuries and illnesses can be accomplished by evaluating the types of claims submitted and structuring safety awareness training programs to eliminate accidents. Information on types of injuries is provided in charts 3 and 4, and tables 2 and 2A. We did not project findings for the remainder of FY02. Key findings are explained below:

- **“Slips/Falls” continue to be the most prevalent type of injury.** “Slips/falls” accounted for 35 percent of all injuries within the Department from FY00 through December 2001. From October 2001 through August 2002, that percentage remained essentially constant at 34 percent of total injuries. Injuries due to “slips/falls” were 15 percent of total injuries for August 2002. More attention should be given to walking surfaces to reduce injuries from slips and falls. Floors that are wet from mopping should have highly visible warning signs, so employees know to avoid those areas. Trips from cords strung across floors continue to cause injuries. Telephone lines, electrical cords, and other cords should also be routed away from walking areas.
- **“Exertion” injuries remain second in frequency for FY02.** “Exertion” injuries are 20 and 29 percent of total injuries for FY02 and the month of August, respectively. To prevent back injuries, employees should use carts to move objects, and avoid hand carrying them. Proper lifting technique includes keeping the back straight and lifting with the legs. For jobs that require repetitive motion, an ergonomics assessment should be conducted.

- **“Struck and Contact” injuries are also a concern.** These injuries combined for 19 percent of those reported for FY02, and 32 percent for August 2002. A majority of the injuries for FY02 were caused when employees struck open drawers, doors, or low overhead clearances. Those injuries can be avoided by closing drawers that are not being used. Employees should also be aware of their surroundings and use caution. Low overhead clearances should be marked with highly visible paint or tape.
- **“Exposures” are on the decline from early FY02.** Two illnesses associated with exposure were reported for the month of August. One case involved an employee who received first degree burns to his face and neck after a hydrogen-filled balloon ignited. The other case involved an employee who was exposed to unidentified fumes. The percentage of total injuries for exposure is 6 percent for FY02 and August 2002. Most exposure illnesses can be prevented through proper ventilation and use of personal protective equipment.

Chart 3
Injury Type As Percentage of Total Injuries for
FY02 Through August 2002

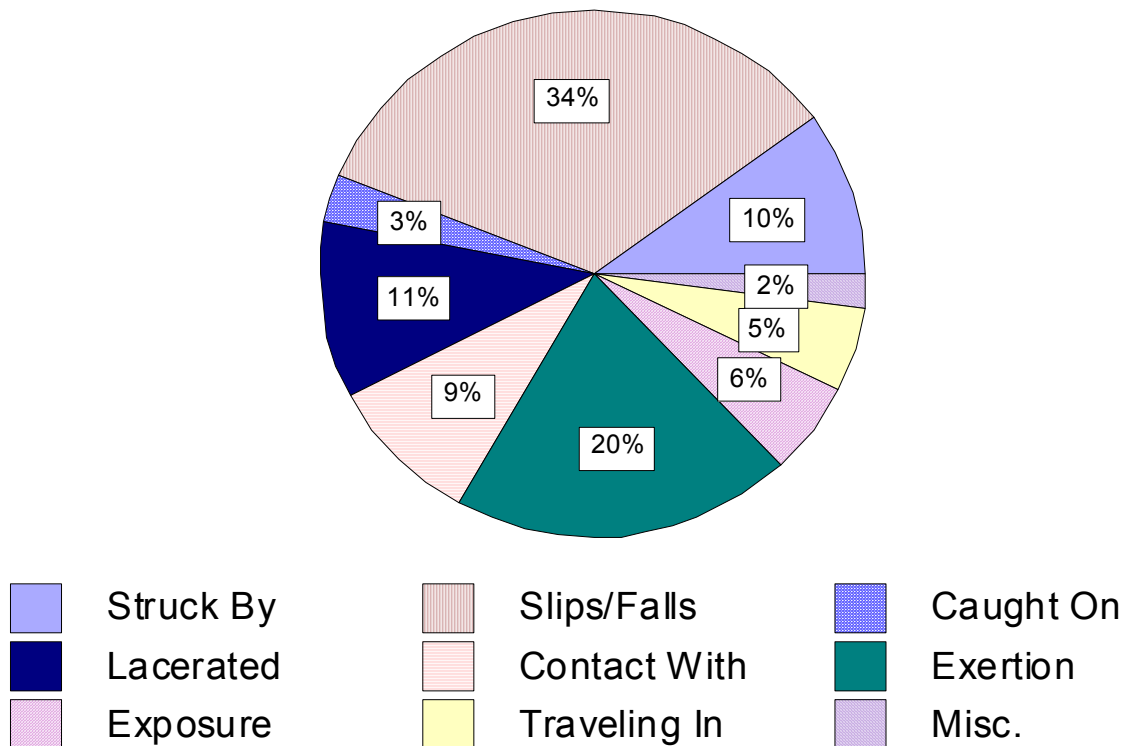
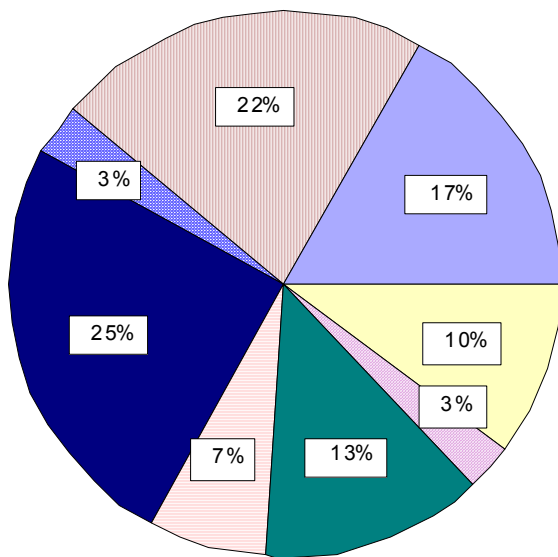


Chart 4

Injury Type As Percentage Of Total Injuries

JULY 2002



AUGUST 2002

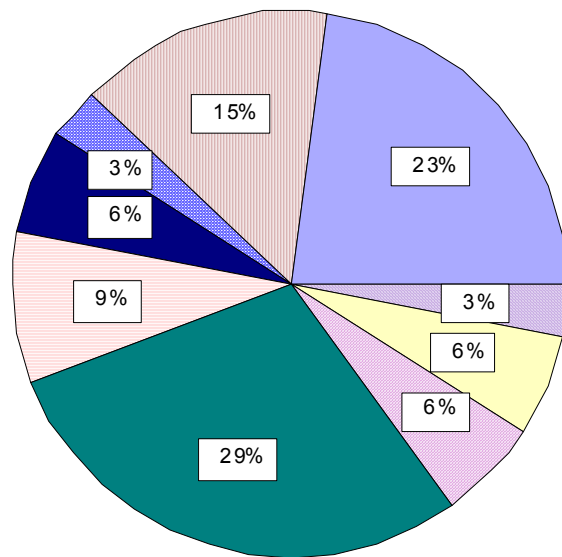


TABLE 1
TOTAL REPORTED CASE INCIDENCE RATE

Bureau	FY1998		FY 1999		FY 2000		FY 2001		June 2002		July 2002		August 2002		FY 2002 (To Date)	
	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate	No.	Rate
Office of the Secretary	17	2.6	19	2.2*	34	3.82	22	2.46	0	0	3	4.4	0	0	20	2.7
Office of Inspector General	2	1.22	2	1.32	5	3.72	2	1.42	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.9
Bureau of Economic Analysis	8	1.74	4	.88	1	.22	5	1.12	0	0	2	6.1	0	0	4	1.1
Bureau of the Census	282	1.32	311	1.02	383	2.82	357	2.18	13	1.4	19	2.1	11	1.3	219	2.2
Bureau of Industry and Security	10	3.0	11	3.06	15	4.06	8	2.16	3	10.3	0	0	0	0	9	2.8
Economic Development Administration	4	1.7	9	3.66	4	1.68	5	2.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	2.4
International Trade Administration	26	1.32	18	.9	24	1.22	10	.5	1	0.7	0	0	0	0	18	1.2
Minority Business Development Agency	1	1.12	1	1.1	3	3.4	4	4.34	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2.5
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	280	2.52	317	2.78	306	2.66	216	1.5	14	1.5	19	2	19	2.0	209	2.0
National Telecommunications & Information Administration	3	1.2	2	.88	2	.86	7	3.02	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	2.7
Patent and Trademark Office	38	.72	27	.46	29	.5	31	.54	2	0.4	0	0	1	0.2	24	0.4
Technology Administration	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
National Institute of Standards and Technology	105	3.56	84	2.86	80	2.86	60	2.06	6	2.4	3	1.2	3	1.2	64	2.4
National Technical Information Service	2	.64	6	2.6	4	2.14	1	.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
TOTAL	778	1.86	811	1.48	890	2.32	728	1.78	39	1.3	47	1.6	34	1.2	582	1.8

Decennial Census 2000	182	3.42	890	11.32	4798	6.65	32	13.33	N/A	N/A
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*Population fluctuations can have a serious positive or negative impact on the Total Reported Case Incidence Rate.

Table 2

INJURY TYPES BY BUREAU AGENCIES WITH MORE THAN 500 EMPLOYEES (Through August 2002)

BUREAU	NOAA			CENSUS			NIST			PTO			ITA			OS			TOTAL
Fiscal Year	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	
Struck By/Against An Object	42	24	26	54	56	22	17	16	2	4	6	4	1	1	1	0	5	2	283
Falls/Slips	83	72	55	96	153	93	17	19	22	11	13	7	13	5	7	9	10	0	685
Caught On An Object	6	4	5	8	9	9	1	1	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	1	50
Cuts/Bites	29	20	26	55	36	22	15	12	9	1	2	2	2	1	0	0	0	2	234
Contact With An Object	23	13	19	49	24	12	8	1	6	5	6	6	1	1	2	0	1	1	178
Exertion/ Motion	75	64	59	99	54	35	15	7	14	8	3	2	4	1	2	6	3	1	452
Exposure To Chemicals/ Elements	29	13	8	12	7	6	4	3	3	0	0	1	0	1	6	18	0	12	123
Traveling In Car/Metro/ Taxi	4	4	10	3	10	16	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	51
Miscellaneous*	15	2	1	7	8	4	2	1	5	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	1	50
TOTAL**	306	216	209	383	357	219	80	60	64	29	31	24	24	10	18	34	22	20	2106

* Miscellaneous includes injuries not covered in the standard OSHA types of injuries. These include twisting/bending injuries, emotional/psychological stress injuries, injuries which exacerbate a preexisting condition resulting in conditions such as heart attack, seizures, and stroke.

** Decennial Census claims were omitted to provide a clearer picture of injury trends

Table 2A

INJURY TYPES BY BUREAU AGENCIES WITH LESS THAN 500 EMPLOYEES (Through August 2002)

Bureau	OIG			ESA/BEA			EDA			TA			NTIS			NTIA			MBDA			BIS			Total
Fiscal Year	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	00	01	02	
Struck By/Against An Object	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	5	0	2	15
Falls/Slips	4	2	0	1	2	2	2	4	5	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	3	3	3	3	2	6	6	0	52
Caught On An Object	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Cuts/Bites	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Contact With An Object	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	8
Exertion/ Motion	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	2	2	10
Exposure To Chemicals/ Elements	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Traveling In Car/Metro/ Taxi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Miscellaneous*	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Total	5	2	1	1	5	4	4	5	5	0	0	0	4	1	1	2	7	6	3	4	2	15	8	9	94

* Miscellaneous includes injuries not covered in the standard OSHA types of injuries. These include twisting/bending injuries, emotional/psychological stress injuries, injuries which exacerbate a preexisting condition resulting in conditions such as heart attack, seizures, and stroke.

Section Four: Survey Results

We continue to receive comments through the Safety Survey Web Site. We are using employee comments to help shape a safety program responsive to employee issues and concerns. The Web Site can be accessed through the Office of Human Resources Management Homepage at <http://ohrm.doc.gov/>.

Every comment we receive is important to us and all issues are being addressed. Some issues have already been corrected. Here are some of the questions and comments we received:

“What is the official procedure and paperwork to report suspected safety violations?”

All Department of Commerce (DOC) employees are encouraged to verbally report unsafe or unhealthful working conditions to their immediate supervisor who must promptly investigate the situation and take appropriate actions, to include reporting the condition to the Area Safety Representative, Regional Safety Manager, or the Operating Unit Safety and Health Representative. Form CD-351 should be used for that purpose. The form is available through the OSH Program Web Site or at:

<http://www.osec.doc.gov/forms/direct.htm>

If Form CD-351 is not readily available, a legible report containing the following information may be submitted.

1. Reason for report: safety or health hazard.
2. Your duty station.
3. Specific location of unsafe or unhealthful condition; (e.g., address, building number, room, etc.).
4. Description of the hazard.
5. Action taken by the responsible supervisor to correct hazard (if known).
6. Employees who wish to remain anonymous shall so indicate on the written report.

When a serious condition exists, immediate action must be taken. That action may include posting a sign, blocking off an area to prevent access, or similar measure.

Additional guidance is provided in the Commerce Occupational Safety and Health Manual. The manual can be accessed through the OSH Web Site at:

<http://ohrm.doc.gov/safetyprogram/safety.htm>

“At NIST Safety seems to have become a high-priority item. I guess that's a good thing. The only concern I have is that this issue is the ONLY thing that seems to be high priority at the current time. What about issues related to the real work we do?”

Safety has always been a high priority at NIST, and we are glad to hear that it remains a high priority. We believe that the safety and health of all Commerce employees is our first priority. No job should be performed unless it can be performed safely. As employees and managers become familiar with safety principles, safety planning can be integrated seamlessly into work activities. We all recognize the importance of the work performed at NIST and the other bureaus. We also know that productivity, success and safety all go together.

“Are employees protected from retaliation if they refuse to perform a task they deem unsafe?”

Employees should voice their safety concerns to the immediate supervisor at the time the assignment is given or when the assignment is to begin. The supervisor must take appropriate steps to correct the unsafe condition. Employees are protected under Section 19 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, Executive Order 12196, the 29 Code of Federal Regulation (CFR), Subpart G. Subpart G further states that employees have the right to “decline to perform his or her assigned task because of a reasonable belief that, under the circumstances the task poses an imminent risk of death or serious bodily harm coupled with a reasonable belief that there is insufficient time to seek effective redress through normal hazard reporting and abatement procedures established in accordance with this part.”

More information on Subpart G and other OSHA regulations is available at the OSHA Web Site at:

http://www.osha.gov/comp_links.html

Safety Survey Statistics

The following tables provide some data regarding the distribution of responses by bureau and general geographical area, as well as general safety impressions.

Safety Survey August Results

Have you experienced a safety lapse in your work area during the past 3 months?		
Answer	Count	Percent
No	17	63%
Yes	8	30%
No Answer	2	7%

Have you noticed any safety improvements in your work area or in the Department as a whole during the past 3 months?		
Answer	Count	Percent
No	14	52%
Yes	11	41%
No Answer	2	7%

Bureau Breakdown		
Answer	Count	Percent
BXA	1	3.7%
CENSUS	7	25.9%
ITA	1	3.7%
NIST	1	3.7%
NOAA	16	59.3%
OS	1	3.7%

Geographical Location		
State	Count	Percent
CA	1	3.7%
CO	3	11.1%
DC	4	14.9%
KS	1	3.7%
MD	12	44.4%
MI	1	3.7%
TN	1	3.7%
VA	2	7.4%
Unreported	2	7.4%